

**Abstract 108**

**TITLE:** Effective Sexual Health Education in Hard to Reach Populations

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**ISSUE:** Delivering HIV prevention education in Anchorage presents the challenges of reaching diverse and disenfranchised populations. In Alaska, these groups are represented by women and youth in treatment as well as immigrant populations.

**SETTING:** The intended audience is youth and women of color in substance abuse treatment facilities in Anchorage, Alaska. Factors such as HIV testing availability in rural areas, cultural approaches to sexual issues, challenges of frontier environments and language difficulties for multi-ethnic audiences must be addressed.

**PROJECT:** Numerous studies have documented barriers to HIV prevention. Literature cites psychosocial issues such as low self-esteem, social isolation, loneliness and lack of intimacy as factors which contribute to disregard for safer sex practices. Alcohol and drug abuse further complicate these issues by compromising judgement. Prevention efforts must be conscious of, and responsive to, these larger psychological, emotional, cultural and social conditions that affect sexual activities. Our series of discussions is based on proven, behavior change methods and covers healthy relationships, communication, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS contraception, maintenance and practice of negotiation skills. Typically, this training covers 7-9 hours which can be broken down to 1 hour modules. This training is specifically client-centered and promotes HIV prevention by promoting sexual health.

**RESULTS:** Based on the programs we have delivered to the Hispanic community in Anchorage, Alaska and the adolescents at The Salvation Army Booth Home and McGlaughlin Youth Center as well as women in recovery at the Alaska Women 's Resource Center, this series has been highly effective in focusing the participants on their individual lifestyle issues.

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Our experience has taught us that HIV prevention and sustained behavior change not only comes from recognition of benefit to self, but also is often intertwined with increased self esteem and confidence. This is not accomplished in a one hour, one shot outreach. The Anchorage Neighborhood Health Center and the Alaskan AIDS Assistance Association have collaborated on a training program which empowers sexually active people to form healthy relationships. Our recommendation is that HIV education be adapted to address all sexual health issue.

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